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SUBJECT: BLACK SEA SYNERGY INITIATIVE MARKS FIRST
ANNIVERSARY

11. (U) SUMMARY: The first anniversary of the European Commission's Black Sea Synergy Initiative provides a useful opportunity to highlight regional cooperation. As the initiative moves from "launch" to "implementation," funding will be available to support local civil society groups committed to working across national boundaries. The fact that the foundational Synergy Initiative document includes a specific reference to the US-supported Black Sea Trust underscores the importance of continued dialogue on regional issues. While initial EU-funded programs focus on the Black Sea, it is also clear that EU officials believe that the approach put forward within the Synergy Initiative is relevant for other areas, including Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region. End Summary.

12. (U) BACKGROUND: The Black Sea Synergy Initiative, launched by the European Commission (EC) to promote regional cooperation in a variety of fields, recently marked its first anniversary. According to Janos Herman, former Hungarian Ambassador to NATO and current Principal Advisor and Deputy Political Director at the Commission for External Relations (RELEX), the initiative is now moving from its "launch phase" to its "implementatation phase," using a regional approach to promote stability and help further progress on various "frozen conflicts" which have hampered cooperation in the region.

13. (U) An April 7, 2007 Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament serves as the foundational document for the Synergy Initiative. According to that document, the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union (EU) at the beginning of 2007 means the "the prosperity, stability and security of our neighbors around the Black Sea are of immediate concern to the EU". As one senior EU official noted, the EU is no longer an "external actor" when it comes to the Black Sea. On the contrary, with the expansion of the EU it now an "integral" part of the region.

14. (U) Main areas of prospective cooperation within the Synergy Initiative include good governance; improved security; "frozen conflicts"; energy; transport; environment; maritime policy; fisheries; trade; research and education; science and technology; employment and social affairs; and regional development. As members of the EU, Bulgaria and Romania have to adhere to EU policy in many of these areas; through participation in the Synergy Initiative, it may be possible to extend EU policy approaches still further within the region.

15. (U) Within the broad framework provided by the Synergy Initiative, three separate EU policies are especially relevant: the pre-accession process of Turkey; the Strategic Partnership with Russia; and the European Neighborhood Policy involving Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Although not all these countries border the Black Sea, EC planning documents note that "history, proximity and close ties" make countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova "natural regional actors," qualifying them for participation in the Black Sea Synergy Initiative.

¶6. (U) EU policy documents also note that the Synergy Initiative is relevant for future regional approaches that may eventually embrace far more than the Black Sea: "The scope of actions could extend beyond the region itself, since many activities remain strongly linked to neighboring regions, notably to the Caspian Sea, Central Asia and South Eastern Europe. There would be a close link between the Black Sea approach and an EU strategy for Central Asia. Black Sea cooperation would include substantial inter-regional elements. It would also take into account other regional programs supported by international organizations and third countries."

¶7. (U) FUNDING: While ambitious in scope, the Synergy Initiative does not come with separate, stand-alone funding. Rather, it must draw funding from other sources, most notably the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument (ENPI). Allocations for that instruments are estimated at one billion euros annually, or more than \$1.5 billion. However, the overwhelming majority of that funding is allocated to Turkey and most of the rest is provided on a bilateral rather than regional basis to neighboring countries. It is only the more limited ENPI funding set aside for regional cooperation that is also available to help promote the Synergy Initiative. In addition, a Neighborhood Investment Facility is being created for investments in energy, transport, environment and other sectors.

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¶8. (U) CIVIL SOCIETY ELEMENTS: While only one of several elements, it is the civil society component of the Synergy Initiative that may be of most interest to the US right now. Although relying on existing approaches to address "frozen conflict" issues, the Synergy Initiative is meant to promote regional cooperation and provide an environment in which it becomes easier to resolve these conflict situations. As Herman commented, the intent is to "create a better atmosphere."

¶9. (U) Interestingly, the EU documents specifically cite the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, managed by the German Marshall Fund and funded by the US, as one example of an existing program that the Synergy Initiative needs to "take into account" as it moves forward. According to Herman, EC officials discussed the Synergy Initiative with German Marshall Fund counterparts before launching their program. Moreover, the intent of the Synergy Initiative is to promote regional discussion forums "very much like what the US is doing".

10.(U) A Black Sea Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) program launched as part of the European Neighborhood Policy is viewed as a key instrument in advancing governance and civil society concerns with the Synergy Initiative. Funding for this program is estimated at 17 million euros (approximately \$26 million), with another five million euros (approximately \$8 million) set aside for Turkey. The first call for proposals under the CBC program will take place by the end of this year, providing an opportunity to engage directly with local civil society actors, including those who interact regularly with the US-funded Black Sea Trust.

¶11. (U) CONCLUDING COMMENT: To some extent, the Synergy Initiative reflects the EU tendency to "package" ostensibly new programs in ways that introduce new acronyms without necessarily adding additional resources. Indeed, at one recent think tank discussion in Brussels the Synergy Initiative was specifically criticized for adding to the plethora of competing and overlapping neighborhood

initiatives. Another criticism, also put forward in the same discussion, is that the Synergy Initiative is more about "compensating" countries that aren't eligible for EU membership rather than "transforming" them. That said, the inclusion of a significant civil society element and the specific reference to US experience under the Black Sea Trust suggests that there is scope for coordination and further conversation between EC officials and US counterparts involved in the Black Sea region. These contacts will become even more important as the Synergy Initiative moves from "launch" to "implementation" and as the Black Sea Cross Border Cooperation component makes additional funding available to local civil society actors committed to promoting regional cooperation around the Black Sea and beyond.

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